

# Our Wine Writer's Top 50 for 2014

Among bottles of Pacific Northwest wine, these stand out. Here are 50 wines from 50 wineries.

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*Special to The Seattle Times*

IT IS RARE anymore to stumble upon a truly awful bottle of Pacific Northwest wine.

Sure, flaws exist, often related to winemaking, storage or even corks. But the quality of grapes, access to equipment and a preponderance of winemaking knowledge make bad wine gloriously uncommon.

As such, the task of narrowing my list for The Seattle Times Top 50 Wines of 2014 is equal parts burdensome and satisfying.

With the plethora of Pacific Northwest wineries — numbering around 1,700 from Washington, Oregon, British Columbia and Idaho — I wanted this list to be as representative as possible, so I spotlighted 50 wines from 50 wineries.

I considered only wines I tasted under blind conditions. Thus, you will not see some notable wineries because they don't submit wines for review. And that's OK, because we already know their wines are superb, and this gives us the opportunity to explore some of the other 5,000 wines I evaluated this year.

With all of this in mind, here are my 50 favorite wines from 2014:

1. DeLille Cellars 2011 Four Flags cabernet sauvignon, Red Mountain, \$65: My wine of the year is a blend from four great vineyards on Red Mountain: Ciel du Cheval, Grand Ciel, Klipsun and Upchurch. I tasted this on four occasions, and it never failed to make a deep impression. This might just be DeLille's finest effort to date — and that's saying something.
2. Obelisco Estate 2010 malbec, Red Mountain, \$35: This stunning red shows the amazing potential of malbec in Washington, thanks to aromas and flavors of dark fruit, exotic spices and hints of cocoa.
3. Saviah Cellars 2011 Elephant Mountain Vineyard G.S.M., Yakima Valley, \$38: A blend of grenache, syrah and mourvèdre, this is a suave and succulent red from one of Walla Walla's best wineries.
4. Bethel Heights Vineyard 2012 Aeolian pinot noir, Eola-Amity Hills, \$42: Based in the hills near Salem, Bethel Heights has long been one of Oregon's finest producers, and this elegant yet powerful pinot further proves it.
5. Upchurch Vineyard 2011 cabernet sauvignon, Red Mountain, \$59: Chris Upchurch, wine-maker for DeLille, scores two wines in my top 50, thanks to his "future retirement project" on Red Mountain. A powerfully gorgeous wine.



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6. Brian Carter Cellars 2011 Opulento, Yakima Valley, \$22: Woodinville winemaker Brian Carter is all about blends, and this fortified dessert wine uses traditional Portuguese varieties. Perfect with blue cheeses.
7. Palencia Wine Co. 2013 albariño, Ancient Lakes of Columbia Valley, \$18: Victor Palencia has a hit on his hands with his new Walla Walla winery. This Spanish white balances bracing acidity with stunning flavors.
8. Bunnell Family Cellar 2009 ALX syrah, Columbia Valley, \$42: Owner/winemaker Ron Bunnell named this new wine for his son, Alex. It is a classic Washington syrah with ripe dark fruit backed with succulent spices.
9. Dusted Valley Vintners 2012 grenache, Columbia Valley, \$39: Last year, the boys from Dusted Valley impressed me with their petite sirah. This year, it's another Rhône variety that emphasizes elegance over power.
10. Woodward Canyon Winery 2013 chardonnay, Washington, \$44: Woodward Canyon's chardonnay has gone through such a transformation in the past 15 years from big and oaky to bright and fruit-driven. This effort is simply stunning.
11. Walla Walla Vintners 2012 cabernet franc, Columbia Valley, \$30: This longtime Walla Walla producer continues to craft some of the valley's best, and this cab franc was a highlight of my year.
12. Barrister Winery 2012 malbec, Walla Walla Valley, \$28: Based in Spokane, Barrister specializes in cab franc, but this malbec was the star this year, thanks to rich, dark flavors loaded with blackberry, spices and dark chocolate.
13. Chehalem 2011 Ridgecrest Vineyards pinot noir, Ribbon Ridge, \$50: Owner Harry Peterson-Nedry champions Ribbon Ridge, a slice of the Chehalem Mountains that is the Northwest's smallest appellation. This stunning pinot noir shows why.
14. Patterson Cellars 2011 cabernet franc, Red Mountain, \$32: John Patterson earned his wine-making chops at Quilceda Creek and now quietly is crafting some of the best wines in Woodinville.
15. Thurston Wolfe 2013 PGMV, Washington, \$16: Wade Wolfe's white blend of pinot gris and viognier is the perfect summer wine, thanks to bright flavors, perfect acidity and impeccable balance.
16. Waterbrook Winery 2012 malbec, Columbia Valley, \$13: Few Washington malbecs can compete with Argentina on both price and quality, but this offering from a longtime Walla Walla winery certainly does.
17. Columbia Crest 2010 reserve cabernet sauvignon, Columbia Valley, \$30: This wine won no fewer than four gold medals this year, and it resonated in my blind tastings. It's a superb example that harkens back to the classic 2005.



18. Reininger Winery 2010 merlot, Walla Walla Valley, \$41: Chuck Reininger quietly goes about his business of making superb wines in Walla Walla. His dedication to great Washington merlot is evident in this bottle.

19. Kyra Wines 2013 chenin blanc, Columbia Valley, \$15: Nobody crafts better chenin blanc than Kyra Baerlocher at her Moses Lake winery. This vintage is as consistently great as the past five.

20. Barnard Griffin 2013 fumé blanc, Columbia Valley, \$10: Rob Griffin is the dean of Washington winemakers, having been at it since 1977. This is among his favorite wines to make, and it's a classic, affordable example of Washington sauvignon blanc.

21. Grantwood Winery 2010 Heritage, Walla Walla Valley, \$14: Joe Grant is crafting superb red wines at prices well below the median in Walla Walla. This blend of cab, merlot and syrah is a delicious wine at a value price.

22. Chateau Ste. Michelle 2013 Cold Creek Vineyard riesling, Columbia Valley, \$16: Head winemaker Bob Bertheau and white winemaker Wendy Stuckey make more riesling than any other winery in the world, and it is some of the best. This vineyard-designated example is bright, juicy and a real treat.

23. Rio Vista Wines 2013 Antoine Creek Vineyards viognier, Columbia Valley, \$23: Rio Vista is along the Columbia River north of the Lake Chelan cutoff. Viognier is notoriously difficult to grow and make, yet this example is beautiful and elegant.

24. Clearwater Canyon Cellars 2012 Phinny Hill Vineyard carmenère, Washington, \$28: This winery in Lewiston, Idaho, crafts wine primarily from Washington grapes, and this rich, peppery red from the Horse Heaven Hills impresses vintage after vintage.

25. L'Ecole No. 41 2013 old vines chenin blanc, Columbia Valley, \$14: Owner Marty Clubb and his crew are crafting some of the state's greatest reds and whites. This underappreciated variety is so beautifully made, it's impossible to ignore.

26. Trio Vintners 2011 Faraway Vineyard grenache, Yakima Valley, \$26: Karen LaBonte is taking this small Walla Walla winery to new heights, and her grenache is an exciting example of what she's beginning to achieve.

27. Jones of Washington 2013 rosé of syrah, Ancient Lakes of Columbia Valley, \$13: This is winemaker Victor Palencia's second wine on the list, and it is a simply stunning pink wine with bright notes of fresh strawberry and raspberry.

28. Winter's Hill Estate 2012 Watershed pinot noir, Dundee Hills, \$25: This longtime Oregon producer is focusing on small lots of high-end pinot noir. This delicious (and affordable) example is its best effort.

29. Maryhill Winery 2011 zinfandel, Columbia Valley, \$17: A decade ago, Maryhill made its mark with zin by beating out some of the best in California. This remains its signature wine — and it's available at a great price.





30. Eleganté Cellars 2009 sangiovese, Walla Walla Valley, \$26: Retired educator Doug Simmons makes small amounts of wines at his Walla Walla airport winery, and he is crafting a bright, luscious and true-to-variety example of sangiovese that impresses every time.

31. 14 Hands Winery 2010 The Reserve cabernet sauvignon, Horse Heaven Hills, \$30: This reserve-level cab from America's fastest-growing winery shows 14 Hands is no one-trick pony. This is a seriously delicious wine.

32. Huston Vineyards 2012 malbec, Snake River Valley, \$29: This is my top-ranked Idaho wine using Idaho grapes. Owners Gregg and Mary Alger and winemaker Melanie Krause crafted a perfectly balanced malbec that's filled with bright red fruit.

33. Karma Vineyards 2010 Pink Bubbly, Lake Chelan, \$40: Based on the south shore of Lake Chelan, Karma focuses on bubbles — and does a superb job of it. This is made from syrah, and it is dry and delicious.

34. Ponzi Vineyards 2012 Tavola pinot noir, Willamette Valley, \$25: Ponzi, one of Oregon's oldest producers, still leads the way with quality and value. Second-generation winemaker Luisa Ponzi crafted this stunner.

35. Wilridge Winery 2010 Wilridge Vineyard nebbiolo, Naches Heights, \$30: In Washington, this Italian variety is one of the rarest of grapes, and this is a superb example with aromas and flavors of strawberry and smoke and telltale firm tannins.

36. AniChe Cellars 2011 Moth Love, Rattlesnake Hills, \$34: Winemaker Rachael Horn is making alluring reds in relative obscurity near the Columbia Gorge town of White Salmon, Klickitat County. This blend of syrah, grenache and mourvèdre is simply amazing.

37. Mosquito Fleet Winery 2011 cabernet sauvignon, Red Mountain, \$39: This winery in the tiny Olympic Peninsula town of Belfair is producing dynamite reds, including this suave yet powerful cab from Red Mountain grapes.

38. Stoller Family Estate 2013 pinot noir rosé, Dundee Hills, \$20: Melissa Burr is among the most talented and versatile young winemakers in Oregon, and this rosé from estate grapes left me salivating for more.

39. Abacela 2013 estate muscat, Umpqua Valley, \$16: Best known for tempranillo and albariño, this Roseburg, Ore., winery also shows a deft touch with the aromatic muscat. This is no floozy of a wine, either, showing intense flavors.

40. Coiled Wines 2013 dry riesling, Snake River Valley, \$17: This is one of the most dramatic dry rieslings in the Northwest, thanks to notes of green apple, minerality and spine-shivering acidity. This is the second consecutive year on my top 50 for this wine.

41. Gamache Vintners 2010 merlot, Columbia Valley, \$25: Longtime grape-growing brothers Bob and Roger Gamache work with winemaker Charlie Hoppes on this fruit-driven, rich merlot.



42. Seven Falls 2011 cabernet sauvignon, Wahluke Slope, \$15: This not-so-little project from Ste. Michelle Wine Estates is a superb wine at a great value. It's sold primarily through restaurants but can be found online, too.

43. Walter Dacon Wines 2009 C'est syrah Belle, Columbia Valley, \$30: Lloyd Anderson specializes in syrah at his small winery near the Olympic Peninsula town of Shelton, and this luscious example exudes rich, dark fruit and classic savory notes.

44. Dowsett Family Winery 2011 Heart of the Hill Vineyard mourvèdre, Red Mountain, \$40: Known primarily in southern France, mourvèdre is showing tremendous promise in Washington. It's a big red wine, especially from arid Red Mountain.

45. Elk Cove Vineyards 2013 pinot blanc, Willamette Valley, \$19: Second-generation winemaker Adam Campbell shows his versatility with this rich yet elegant white wine. It's a perfect sipper with seafood.

46. Youngberg Hill Vineyards 2012 Cuvée pinot noir, Willamette Valley, \$35: This winery and inn not far from Salem, Ore., is in one of the prettiest spots in the Northwest. And the wines have made tremendous leaps, thanks to the winemaking of owner Wayne Bailey. This is classic Mc-Minnville pinot noir, with dark, brooding fruit and firm underpinnings.

47. J&J Vintners 2012 Les Collines Vineyard syrah, Walla Walla Valley, \$30: This young Walla Walla winery is one to keep your eye on, as it is crafting several superb wines. This syrah is the best of the bunch, revealing dark fruit, moderate tannins and rich spiciness.

48. Mercer Canyons 2013 riesling, Yakima Valley, \$10: Winemaker Jessica Munnell is crafting fine reds and whites for Mercer Estates in the Yakima Valley. This luscious riesling is so delicious and affordable, it's hard to pass up.

49. Smasne Cellars 2011 The Farmer Red, Columbia Valley, \$18: Robert Smasne grew up in Yakima Valley farm country, and this blend of cab, syrah and malbec pays homage to his family roots. It's also darned delicious and affordable.

50. Zerba Cellars 2011 Cockburn Vineyard estate mourvèdre, Walla Walla Valley, \$38: Wine-maker Doug Nierman rarely misses the target at this Walla Walla Valley winery. This red from estate grapes on the Oregon side of the valley is rich with red fruit, solid structure and tremendous depth.

